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Impact and Innovation: *Exploring a Shared Heritage*

An overview of the Research Activity undertaken between the **Center for Irish Partnerships, University of Massachusetts Lowell** and the **School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology, Queen's University Belfast** 2010-2015

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The Collaboration Agreement

In March 2009 Chancellor Marty Meehan of the University of Massachusetts in Lowell (UMass Lowell) travelled to Belfast to sign a Collaboration Agreement with Vice-Chancellor Peter Gregson and Queen's University Belfast (QUB). The UMass Lowell delegation also included members of UMass Lowell's Center for Irish Partnerships (CIP) – Professor Frank Talty, Professor Steve McCarthy, Professor Ann Marie Hurley and Victoria Denoon – and as part of their visit they were invited to a presentation by Dr Colm Donnelly (GAP) at which a program to study our shared history and heritage was outlined, involving archaeological studies to be conducted both in Lowell and in Northern Ireland. The following text highlights what has been accomplished since 2010 when our research activities commenced. The value of what has been achieved to date can be gauged through the decision by Patrick Ó Murphy, Mayor of the City of Lowell, to officially proclaim 20th September 2013 as "Irish Partnerships Day".

The Irish connection in Lowell's origins

Recognised as the birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution in the 19th century, Lowell became the first urban National Historic Park in the USA in 1978. Incorporated in 1823 as a planned manufacturing centre for textile production, this was a green-field development on the former farmlands of East Chelmsford. The new industrial town was the work of a group of Bostonian entrepreneurs – The Boston Manufacturing Company – who named the new settlement after their former leader Francis Cabot Lowell, who had died of pneumonia at the age of 42 in 1817. The businessmen had need of a steady water supply to power their textile machines and this is what drew their attention to East Chelmsford. They located their mills at the confluence of the Merrimack and Concord Rivers but they

required canals to be excavated to bring the water to the mills. This work was undertaken by local "Yankees", but working alongside them were Irish labourers from Boston, hired by the company's agent Kirk Boott. The first crew of 30 Irish workers arrived on 5th April 1822 to undertake the widening of the Pawtucket Canal. As more Irish became employed on the canal schemes they began to settle with their families in an area of land – known as the Acre – which lay outside the boundaries of the new town. By 1830 the Irish population had grown to 400, while twenty years later it had risen to 6,000 people, representing some 20% of the town population.

Irish-America and Massachusetts

The bedrock on which the relationship between CIP and GAP

has been founded is the strong ties of kinship that exist between the USA and the island of Ireland. In the US Census in 2010 some 33 million American citizens stated that their ancestry was "Irish", making the Irish-Americans the second largest ethnic group within the USA, second only to people of German ancestry. Within Massachusetts, which has a population of 6.7 million, approximately 21% (or 1.4 million people) recorded their ancestry as Irish, making this the most "Irish" state in the USA. When individual towns within the state are considered, however, that percentage can be considerably higher, ranging from 39% of the population in Weymouth to 60% of the population in Squantum.



A tour-boat travelling along the Pawtucket Canal in the heart of Lowell's historic urban landscape. It was the widening of this canal in 1822 which brought the first Irish work-crew to the fledgling industrial town.

Archaeological Excavations in Lowell (2010-2012)

Lowell occupies a significant place in the global discipline of historical archaeology, as the setting for the expansion of industrial archaeology into exploring workers' lives and labour history through work sponsored by the National Park Service in the 1980s. GAP archaeologists built on this strong base through exploring the pre-Famine experiences of the Irish labour force by focusing on a site central to their experience and with an eye on contemporary impact within Lowell. The first St Patrick's Church was erected in 1832 in the heart of the Acre. The first Roman Catholic place of worship in the city, the old church was a small timber construction

and by the early 1850s it was no longer capable of accommodating the large congregation. The Acre itself changed over those 30 years, developing from a shanty town of labourers to a settled Irish-American community, housed in and around the church and including the homestead of Fr James McDermott, the parish priest. These properties were systematically bought-out by the parish in the early 1850s to facilitate the construction of a much grander stone church – the current St Patrick's Church, completed 1854 – while the area to the front of the new church was laid out as a lawn between 1869 and 1879. This action meant that no further development took place on this part of the Acre, while the soil associated with the new lawn covered over the archaeological evidence associated with the area's first

settlers. Three successful seasons of community-engaged archaeological excavation (2010, 2011 and 2012) were undertaken on this lawn, with some 3,000 artefacts recovered, ranging from clay tobacco pipes and metalwork to animal bones and pottery – providing us with direct insight into the daily lives of the early Irish population in the Acre and also revealing the foundations of Fr McDermott's house, well and backyard.



August 2012: Dr Emily Murray (QUB) sieving soil excavated at the site of Fr McDermott's house of c.1850, now covered by the lawn to the front of the second St Patrick's Church (constructed 1854, and visible to the rear of the photograph).

Transatlantic Excavations: The Cummiskey Homestead, Co Tyrone (2011-2012)

Exploring the transatlantic dimension of the Irish experience in Lowell relied upon scientific field research by the partners in both Massachusetts and in Northern Ireland. The Irish component of the fieldwork was undertaken at a site with specific and symbolic connections to Lowell. A key individual in the establishment of the Irish community in early Lowell was Hugh Cummiskey (1789-1871), who ran a labour contracting firm – and a brewery – with his brother James in Boston. The Cummiskeys were commissioned by Kirk Booth

to bring the first group of Irish labourers to Lowell in 1822 and they subsequently settled in the Acre. Historical research identified that the brothers originated from the townland of Crossan, near Dromore in County Tyrone, and that they had immigrated to Boston in 1817. Further research identified their ruined homestead within the Crossan landscape and this then formed the location for two seasons of archaeological fieldwork, in 2011 and 2012, with a team of students drawn from both UMass Lowell and QUB – providing a one of a kind opportunity for international students to share in a process of mutual discovery.



Students from UMass Lowell and QUB undertaking the archaeological excavation at the Cummiskey Homestead in Crossan, County Tyrone, September 2011. The house had its origins as a simple byre-dwelling, of probable 18th-century date, and continued in use until it was abandoned following a fire in 1979.

Finding the people: Headstone analysis at St Patrick's Cemetery, Lowell

Since 2010 Dr Eileen Murphy (GAP), an expert in osteoarchaeology and mortuary studies, has been working

with Lowell historians David McKean and Walter Hickey to record and analyse headstones in St Patrick's Cemetery, established in 1831. Erected by the first generation of Irish settlers, these stones mirror those used by "Yankee" contemporaries, but also include

inscribed shamrock motifs as a symbol of the Irish origin of the people that they commemorate. These markers are unique in the USA and speak to the negotiation of identity in an early Irish-American immigrant community.



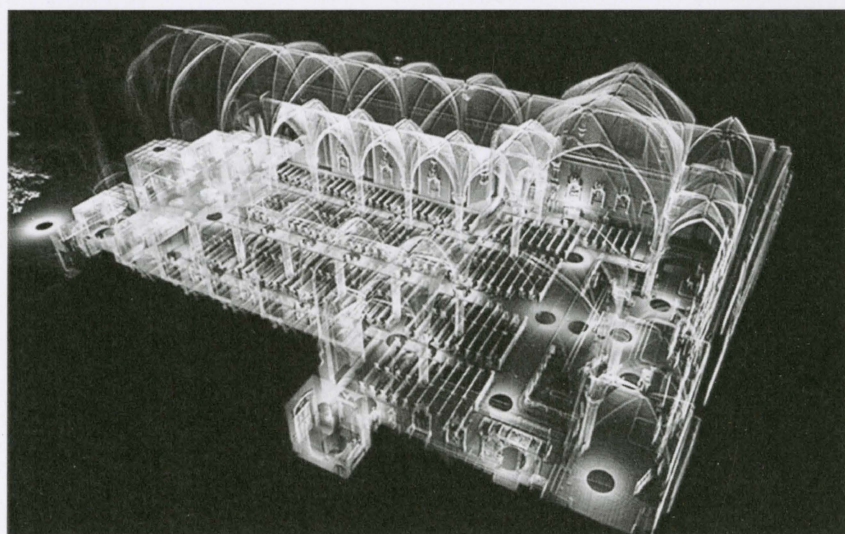
Dr Eileen Murphy and Walter Hickey recording headstones in St Patrick's Cemetery, September 2015

3D Survey of St Patrick's Church, the Acre, Lowell

GAP leads innovation in the use of digital technology in the recording and conservation of the built heritage. In September 2013 GAP technician John Meneely undertook a 3D laser-scanned survey of the second St Patrick's Church in the Acre. Designed by the Irish architect Patrick Keeley, the building was erected in 1854 and is listed on the US National Register of Historic Places. One of the finest surviving Neo-Gothic churches in Massachusetts, St Patrick's is a landmark feature of Lowell's urban landscape. The survey collected a "data cloud" of 8 billion readings that permit millimetre-accurate

images to be generated to inform the understanding, conservation, and presentation of this building

of considerable significance to the local community and the wider Irish diaspora.



3D laser-scanned view of the interior of St Patrick's Church, revealing the building's internal "skeleton".

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The Irish in Massachusetts: The 1st CIP-GAP Transatlantic Conference:

In September 2014, the partners held a three-day international conference at the UMass Lowell Inn and Conference Center exploring the Irish contribution to the history, heritage and culture of Massachusetts through 13 invited lectures and four panel sessions. Following the success of this first venture, plans are underway for a second conference to take place in 2016.



Professor Audrey Horning (Head of School, Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology at QUB), Professor Tim Meagher (Department of History, Catholic University of America, Washington DC, and the conference's Key-Note Speaker), Professor Brian Mitchell (President of Bucknell University, Pennsylvania, 2004-2010) and Grace Brady (Executive Director, Ireland's Great Hunger Museum, Quinnipiac University, Connecticut).



Chancellor Marty Meehan with his guest-panellists for the conference's session entitled "Irish-American Politics in Massachusetts". From left to right, Chancellor Meehan, The Honorable Kathleen Kennedy Townsend (Lieutenant Governor of Maryland, 1995-2003), Ray Flynn (Mayor of Boston, 1984-1993; US Ambassador to the Vatican, 1993-1997), and the Honorable David Bartley (Speaker of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, 1969-1975).

Shamrock motif on headstone belonging to Ellen O'Connor, who died in 1836, St Patrick's Cemetery, Lowell, Massachusetts



City of Lowell
Commonwealth of Massachusetts

By his honor
Patrick G. Murphy
Mayor

A Proclamation

Whereas In 1822, Hugh Cumiskey led a group of Irishmen from Boston to Lowell to dig the canals that bore the new world's first planned industrial city and America's Industrial Revolution; and

Whereas Three years ago, UMass Lowell's partnership with Queen's University Belfast led to the first historical archaeological dig at St. Patrick's Church in Lowell's Acre neighborhood, site of the initial Irish habitation in the 1820's; and

Whereas The continued partnership and exchanges through the Irish-American Heritage Archaeological Program, which has including digs both in Lowell and Ireland has expanded the students' perspective on a global level, as well as provided a deeper cultural and historical understanding of the history of both nations and their connections yesterday and today.

Now, Therefore, I, Patrick G. Murphy, Mayor of the City of Lowell, Massachusetts, do hereby proclaim Friday, September 20th as: "Irish Partnerships Day" in the City of Lowell, and urge all citizens to participate in the celebration.

Given this 20th day of September 2013

**Patrick G. Murphy, Mayor,
City of Lowell**

Proclamation by Patrick Ó Murphy, Mayor of the City of Lowell, dated 20th September 2013, announcing that date as "Irish Partnerships Day".

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Front cover image: Labourers working on the Merrimack Canal in Lowell, Massachusetts, c.1897.

A network of 5.6 miles of canals criss-crosses the historic town of Lowell, built and maintained throughout the nineteenth century by a workforce of primarily Irish origin.